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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SPINOZA'S THEORY OF TRUTH

by

JUDITH K. SIMONSEN

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Spinoza's Theory of Truth

submitted by Judith K. Simonsen

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Spinoza's theory of truth, like the epistemology from which it emerges, is not an easy one for us to grasp. Just when we feel we have enough evidence before us to ascribe a given theory to him, we can locate other, seemingly contradictory statements, which seem to point us in the direction of other theories. Nor is our task made easier by turning to commentaries on Spinoza's epistemology. We are told by some that Spinoza adheres to a Correspondence Theory of Truth,[1] while others will claim that in fact he adheres to either a Coherence Theory, or at least to a modified form thereof.[2] One contemporary writer, however, suggests that in fact he adheres to both Coherence and Correspondence Theories,[3] and it is this position which will serve as a starting point for this thesis.

I say a "starting point" since I wish to postulate that Spinoza adheres to three, rather than to two, theories of truth. Nor does it appear to me that he is conscious of tension between these different truth theories, and this, I will suggest, is because he correlates them with the different levels of knowledge which he

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[1]Harry Wolfson, The Philosophy of Spinoza, 2 vols. (New York: Schoken Books, 1969), 2:103; James Martineau, A Study of Spinoza, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1882), pp. 110-111.

[2]Harold Joachim, A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 149; Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza, (London: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 101-102.

[3]Thomas Mark, Spinoza's Theory of Truth, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 53-54.

postulates. By doing so he makes the truth theory to which we adhere a matter of our epistemological 'development': from most primitive to most perfect. This thesis is an attempt to work through these three positions. It is hoped that in our attempt to make clear exactly what the positions are, we may come to understand in what manner Spinoza thought that these beliefs could not only co-exist, but could be successfully interwoven to form one coherent theory.

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This thesis is dedicated to my family in appreciation for their constant encouragement and support.

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CHAPTER I

CORRESPONDENCE THEORY

Correspondence Theory, which has been referred to as "the standard theory of truth in the middle ages"[1], affords us a good starting place in our investigation of what truth theory Spinoza adhered to. John Locke says the following in his discussion of truth:

> And therefore truth as well as knowledge may well come under the distinction of verbal and real; that being only verbal truth, wherein terms are joined according to the agreement or disagreement of the ideas they stand for; without regarding whether our ideas are such as really have, or are capable of having, an existence in nature. But then it is that they contain <u>real truth</u>, when these ideas are joined, as our ideas agree; and when our ideas are such as we know are capable of having an existence in nature: which in substances we cannot know, but by knowing that such have existed.[2]

What Locke refers to here as "real truth" could still be acceptable as a definition for many modern Correspondence Theorists. Whyte, for example, defines it in the following manner: "To say that something is true is to say that there is a correspondence between it and a fact."[3] For both these philosophers there must be something other than what is said or thought: something which exists in nature, which makes what is said or thought true. If we accept these two

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[1]Harry Wolfson, <u>The Philosophy of Spinoza</u>, 2:98.

[2]John Locke, <u>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</u>, 2 vols., collated by A. Fraser, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1959), 2: pp. 248-249.

[3]A. Whyte, <u>Truth</u>, (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 98.

quotations as yielding a definition of Correspondence Theory, do we find that Spinoza agrees or disagrees with them?

According to Axiom 6, Ethics I, "A true idea must agree with that of which it is the idea." In fact an idea must "in all respects correspond to its correlate in the world of reality."[4] Further, when our ideas have the 'correct order'[5] we can say that "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."[6] It is when our minds "reflect Nature"[7] in this way, that we can appreciate that it is

> . . . before all things necessary for us to deduce our ideas from physical things--that is from real entities , proceeding, as far as may be, according to the series of causes, from one real entity to another real entity, never passing to universals and abstractions for the purpose of either deducing some real entity from them or deducting them from real entities.[8]

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[4]Benedict de Spinoza, Ethics preceded by On the Improvement of the Understanding, ed. J. Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1974), p. 14. (On the Improvement of the Understanding will be hereafter cited as Spinoza, O.I.U. The Ethics will be cited hereafter as Spinoza, Ethics)

[5]We will examine this notion of a 'correct order' of knowing to correspond to our existent order in nature further in Chapter 3. At the moment it is sufficient if we remember that a knowledge of this order must be a knowledge of "laws inscribed (so to speak) in those things as in their true codes, according to which all particular things take place and are arranged." (Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 34) A collection of empirical data about Nature then, is not sufficient for the sort of understanding which Spinoza here refers to.

[6]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 7, p. 83.

[7]Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 33.

[8]Ibid.

Correspondence leads to comparing, and when we 'compare' our ideas with objects in the world, a true idea will agree with that object of which it is the idea. Indeed, we can expect an exact correspondence between our ideas and their "correlates" in the "world of reality". Knowledge of an "effect" is dependent upon a "knowledge of the cause" however; and we shall see shortly the role that this causal relationship will play in the inadequacy of the first kind of knowledge.

"The human mind", he says, "when it perceives things in the common order of nature has no adequate knowledge of itself nor of its own body, nor of external bodies, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge."[9] This statement of Spinoza's seems to me to hold the key to the manner in which he believed the theories in question to be compatable. Perceptions that we receive from the world around us do indeed supply us with knowledge, but the knowledge is of the most unsatisfactory sort, namely that from "vague experience", from "opinion, or imagination".

While we do gain knowledge from perception of what is around us, we must be very suspicious of it, as: "to knowledge of the first kind we have said, in the preceding note, that all those ideas belong which are . . the cause of falsity."[10] In other words, this is perception "arising from mere experience--that is from experience not yet classified by the intellect."[11] At this level of knowledge we are bombarded by sense impressions, impressions which are both confusing and contradictory.

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[9]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 29, p. 105.

[10]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 41, p. 113.

[11]Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 7.

Indeed, the very nature of the information which we receive at this level of knowledge is conducive to falsity: "this knowledge alone is the cause of falsity."[12]

In propositions 23-31 Spinoza provides us with details as to which areas of our external knowledge are deficient; and from his enumeration we find that all are. He summarizes his conclusions thus:

> From this it is evident that the human mind, when it perceives things in the common order of Nature, has no adequate knowledge of itself nor of its own body, nor of external bodies, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge; for the mind does not know itself unless in so far as it perceives the ideas of the modifications of the body (Prop. 23, pt. 2). Moreover (Prop. 19, pt. 2), it does not perceive its body unless through those same ideas of the modifications by means of which alone (Prop. 26, pt. 2) it perceives external bodies. Therefore, in so far as it possesses these ideas it possesses an adequate knowledge neither of itself (Prop. 29, pt. 2), nor of its body (Prop. 26, pt. 2), nor of external bodies (Prop. 25, pt. 2), but merely (Prop. 28, pt. 2, together with the Note) a mutilated and confused knowledge. - Q.E.D.
>
> Note. I say expressly that the mind has no adequate knowledge of itself, nor of its body, nor of external bodies, but only a confused knowledge as often as it perceives things in the common order of Nature, that is to say, as often as it is determined to the contemplation of this or that externally--namely, by a chance coincidence, and not as often as it is determined internally--for the reason that it contemplates several things at once, and is determined to understand in what they differ, agree, or oppose one another; for whenever it is internally disposed in this or in any other way, it then contemplates things clearly and distinctly, as I shall show presently.[13]

Let us attempt a summary of the claims made by Spinoza in this passage. When we perceive things in the "common order" of nature, our perceptions of them are inadequate and faulty. We could say, in fact, that just those sorts of knowledge which constitute knowledge of

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[12]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 41, p. 113.

[13]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 29, p. 105.

the first kind have been found, upon investigation, to be most "inadequate".

What then is the analysis which Spinoza offers us of this inadequacy? The answer he gives us is twofold. First, there is the fact that this knowledge is determined externally, which means that it was caused by a "chance coincidence". I take this as being an epistemological claim. When we know because of a perception which has been caused, or determined externally, we do indeed know; but the knowledge that we have is of an inadequate or inferior sort. In other words it is how we come to know which makes this sort of knowledge inferior. In contrast to this, Spinoza offers us an example of knowledge which is determined internally. This sort of knowledge can be characterized as being "determined to understand", and by means of it we can come to contemplate things "clearly and distinctly".[14]

It is not only how we come to know that is at fault in the first kind of knowledge however; it is also what we come to know at this level. Since "all individual things are contingent and corruptable"[15] we can have "no adequate knowledge regarding their duration." The inadequacy of this type of knowledge, then, is also of an ontological nature. Again, Spinoza offers us a contrast to that which is inadequate. While individual things are "contingent", necessitating that we classify our knowledge of them as "inadequate"; it is in God, or Nature, that we find that which is not contingent; it is here alone that we find a fully adequate knowledge: "an adequate knowledge of the way in which things

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[14]This will be discussed more adequately in Chapter 3.

[15]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 31, p. 106.

are constituted exists in God in so far as He possesses the ideas of all things."[16]

Given the problems which arise with this level of knowledge, we may ask whether Spinoza will ever allow that the relation of Correspondence between an idea and an external object could be guaranteed. Further, given the views which have been expressed on causality, can we say that an idea corresponds to an object just to that extent to which there is a causal relationship? Let us recall Def. 1 of Ethics III: "adequate cause" is one whose "effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived by means of the cause" and an "inadequate or partial cause" is one "whose effect cannot be understood by means of the cause alone."[17]

The relation of Correspondence to external objects can be guaranteed then, but only in those cases where the cause is "adequate", and as we have already seen, in the case of first kind of knowledge the cause cannot be adequate. It cannot be adequate both because it is caused externally, and because it is knowledge of individual objects. It is then, not the extent to which there is a causal relationship which guarantees adequacy, but rather the origin of the cause. Externally caused knowledge of individual objects could not, according to Spinoza, be otherwise than inadequate. For him it is the Correspondence Theory of Truth itself which weakens its claim to being the highest degree of truth and knowledge. It is only when we move to the second and third kinds of knowledge, where we deal with "internally caused" knowledge; knowledge

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[16]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 30, p. 106.

[17]Spinoza, Ethics II, Def. I, p. 128.

of "those things which are common to everything, and which are equally in the part and in the whole."[18] that our knowledge can be "adequate" and that the correspondence of an idea to an object can be guaranteed.

How can we summarize the attitude of Correspondence Theory which Spinoza has so far revealed? While we do gain knowledge from the external world, while we do "compare" our ideas with external objects, the knowledge that we obtain in this way is "partial" and "confusing". Not only is it inadequate epistemologically, since it is "externally caused", it is also inadequate ontologically since it is of "individual things".

A question which may arise at this interval is why Spinoza would choose to call this sort of knowing "knowledge"? Why does he not call it sense-experience? Given what he has so far stated about its inadequacy, why not make a distinction between "knowledge" and "belief" similar to that which Plato makes.[19] I think the answer to this lies in his claim about the "double-aspect" of substance, and for an explanation of this let us return to the proof he gives that the "order and connection of things" is the same as the "order and connection of ideas."

Since God's power of thought is equal to his power of action "whatever follows formally from the infinite nature of God, follows from the idea of God (idea Dei) in the same order and in the same

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[18] Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 38, p. 109.

[19] Plato, The Republic, Tr. by F. Cornford, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 186.

connection objectively in God."[20] Further,

> everything which can be perceived by the infinite intellect as constituting the essence of substance pertains entirely to the one sole substance only, and consequently that substance thinking and substance extended are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute and now under that. Thus, also, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing expressed in two different ways . . . . For example, the circle existing in Nature and the idea that is in God of an existing circle are one and the same thing which is manifested through different attributes.[21]

It would seem then that it is the ontological underpinnings of Spinoza's epistemology which makes it necessary for him to call the first sort of knowledge "knowledge", rather than "sense experience" or "belief". Given his claim that thought and extension are two attributes of one substance, he must accept a Correspondence Theory of Truth. The first kind of knowledge is indeed knowledge, knowledge which is inadequate only because of both how it is caused, and what its content is.

While our discussion of the inadequacy of the first kind of knowledge is almost complete, we have not yet discussed the relationship of the "adequacy" of knowledge to the "activity" of the mind. "Our mind acts at times and at times suffers" he tells us, "in so far as it has adequate ideas, it necessarily acts; and in so far as it has inadequate ideas, it necessarily suffers."[22] For Spinoza then, there is a correlation between the activity of the mind and the adequacy of

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[20] Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 7, p. 83.

[21] Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 7, p. 84.

[22] Spinoza, Ethics III, Prop. 1, p. 129.

an idea; "the actions of the mind follow from adequate ideas alone."[23] While any action of the mind can be explained by adequate ideas, passive states are "not related to the mind, unless in so far as it possesses something which involves negation, in other words, unless in so far as it is considered part of Nature which by itself and without the other parts cannot be clearly and distinctly perceived."[24]

This accords well with what Spinoza has so far told us. The state of passivity, as so far described, must be operative at the first level of knowledge, as it is at this level that things are represented in "a mutilated and confused manner and without order to the intellect."[25] The same factors which were brought out in Prop. 29 of Ethics II are here reiterated. Passivity is associated with the possession of knowledge of individuals, which of necessity is incomplete or "fragmentary."

It seems fair to claim at this juncture that Spinoza is committed to a Correspondence Theory of Truth. What becomes problematic about our acceptance that Spinoza does indeed so commit himself, is that we must also account for his adherance to both coherance, and to what I shall here call 'clarity', theories of truth. How then can we characterize his stance? Is he simultaneously committed to theories which contradict each other? Does his position, in fact, collapse into incoherance? I believe that he thought not, and it is a part of my position that he believed rather that the various theories which he

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[23]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 3, p. 134.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 40, p. 112.

held and expounded were genuinely compatable; a belief which I shall attempt to delineate in the following chapters.

If we now have enough information before us to see how Spinoza's adherance to Correspondence Theory must be discussed within a larger epistemological and metaphysical framework; we still have the problem mentioned earlier of characterizing the relationship of Correspondence Theory to Coherance Theory in his work. I suggest that he sees them as occupying a relationship somewhat similar to that of a parent and child. The child (Correspondence, 1st level of knowledge) interacts vigorously with his environment and soaks up impressions thereof. The information which the child receives is often confused, however, and while we may respect his perceptions of the world, we will not go to him for an explanation of his environment, as we do not assume he will be able to give one. His parent, on the other hand, has spent more time reasoning about his situation. He then, spends time correcting the child; explaining to him the mistaken conclusions he has reached by his too hasty acceptance of information "arising from mere experience--that is, from experience not yet classified by the intellect."[26]

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[26]Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 7.

CHAPTER 2

COHERENCE THEORY

Coherence Theory was defined in the following manner by Leibniz:

> Let us now see by what criteria we may know which phenomena are real . . . . We conclude it from the phenomenon itself if it is vivid, complex, and internally coherent . . . . A phenomenon will be coherent when it consists of many phenomena, for which a reason can be given either within themselves or by some sufficiently simple hypothesis common to them; next it is coherent if it conforms to the customary nature of other phenomena which have repeatedly occured to us, so that its parts have the same position, order, and outcome in relation to the phenomenon which similar phenomena have had . . . . But certainly a most valid criterion is consensus with the whole sequence of life, especially if many others affirm the same thing to be coherent with their phenomena also . . . . Yet the most powerful criterion of the reality of phenomena, sufficient even by itself, is success in predicting future phenomena from the past and present ones, whether that prediction is based upon a reason, upon a hypothesis that was previously successful, or upon the customary consistency of things as observed previously . . . .[1]

Even as Locke's definition of Correspondence was felt to be compatable with that of Whyte, so too if we compare Leibniz's and Whyte's definitions of Coherence Theory, we do not find disagreement between them. For Whyte, to say that what is said is true or false;

> . . . is to say that it coheres or fails to cohere with a system of other things which are said, that it is a member of a system

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[1]Gottfried Leibniz, "On the Method of Distinguishing Real From Imaginary Phenomena," G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters, trans. and ed. L. Loemker, (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Co., 1956) pp.

> whose elements are related to each other by ties of logical implication as the elements in a system of pure mathematics are related . . . the metaphysical supporters of Coherence . . . insist that nothing can properly be called true unless it fits into the one comprehensive account of the universe or reality, which itself forms a coherent system. In either case, nothing can be known to be true unless it is known to cohere with every other element of the system.[2]

Of commentators on Spinoza more seem to attribute a belief in Coherence Theory to him than a belief in Correspondence Theory. Joachim, for example, in speaking of "true ideas" in Spinoza's work, says that a true idea, for Spinoza, ". . . is true because it is inwardly real, complete, coherent, adequate, not because it 'agrees with' something outside of it."[3] By his rejection here of the truth of an idea being reliant upon its agreement with something external Joachim has specifically rejected Correspondence Theory as a possible interpretation of Spinoza's work. Rather than give us a satisfactory explanation of statements which are at variance with the theory that he wishes to espouse, however, he refers to these as "lapses", saying; "We must bear Spinoza's general position in mind and interpret occasional obscurities and lapses simply as lapses: as survivals from his earlier mental history . . . ."[4]

While Hampshire too, will characterize Spinoza's system as involving Coherence Theory; his claim is more modest.

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[2]A.R. Whyte, Truth, p. 110.

[3]H. Joachim, A Study of . . ., p. 149.

[4]Joachim, Ibid., p. 154.

> . . . within Spinoza's system it is essential, in the sense that he could not have maintained his main metaphysical premise--the Universe as one substance revealed to us in the two attributes of Thought and Extension--without at the same time maintaining some form of the Coherence Theory of Truth.[5]

Given that the connection which Hampshire claims to be a necessary one; namely that between Spinoza's Coherence Theory and its underlying metaphysical premises, is of obvious importance in any enquiry into his expression of Coherence Theory, it can serve as a starting point for us in this area of our investigation.

At the beginning of Part II of his Ethics Spinoza applies his theory of attributes and modes to the realm of thought, and we are shown the relationship between "finite modes" of thought and the "infinite mode" of thought. A finite mode of thought is a "particular idea" which is about an "individual thing". 'The idea of any individual thing actually existing is an individual's mode of thought, and is distinct from other modes of thought."[6] While finite thoughts are experienced by finite beings (individual humans), infinite thought is an "attribute" of the infinite Being, or God. Further, as God is "one only", it will follow that the "idea" of God must also be single. "The idea of God, from which infinite numbers of things follow in infinite ways, can be one only."[7] Still, "individual thoughts, or this and that thought, are modes which express the nature of God."[8] We can say of thought generally, in fact, that it is "one of the infinite attributes

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[5]Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza, (London: Penguin Books, 1962) p. 101.

[6]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 9, p. 86.

[7]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 4, p. 82.

[8]Ibid., Prop. 1, p. 80.

of God."[9] Indeed, since God has a knowledge of everything which proceeds from his own essence, it must be the case that "in God there necessarily exists the idea of his essence and of all things which necessarily follow from his essence."[10]

Given that Spinoza develops parts of his epistemological program from metaphysical premises previously formulated, it is inevitable that the same problems which occured in his metaphysics will recur in his epistemology. In Ethics I, for example, Spinoza failed in his attempt to show how finite things could follow from an infinite God which was yet one, failed even to meet the requirements of his own argument; for "An individual thing, or a thing which is finite and which has a determinate existence, cannot exist nor be determined to action unless it be determined to existence and action by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence . . . ."[11] Just as Spinoza could not derive individual or finite things from the one substance in Ethics I, so can he here not derive finite modes of thought from the "one idea", or the "infinite thought" which is an attribute of God.

For Spinoza particular ideas are not to be distinguished from God (specifically, from his infinite intellect). We are reduced to "one idea", and it must be true; "All ideas, in so far as they are related to God are true."[12] This certainly accords well with Whyte's

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., prop. 32, p. 107.

[11] Ethics I, prop. 28, p. 64.

[12] Ibid., prop. 32, p. 107.

definition that ". . . nothing can properly be called true unless it fits into the one comprehensive account of the universe or reality"; and I think that our investigation has now left us in a position to agree with Hampshire that ". . . a peculiar form of the Coherence Theory of Truth is a logically necessary part of Spinoza's system, and of any metaphysical monism or One-Substance doctrine."[13] What we wish to be careful to maintain is that, while it is a logically necessary part of Spinoza's truth system, it is only a part; we do not, with Joachim, view the other theories developed by him as "lapses".

Returning to Spinoza's position that the "one idea" is "true", we might ask how he will be able to account for falsity. The explanation that he gives us is that it is an instance of "incompleteness" or "inadequacy". He says:

> Therefore, when we say that the human mind perceives this or that thing, we say nothing else than that God has this or that idea, not indeed in so far as He is infinite, but . . . in so far as He forms the essence of the human mind; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not merely in so far as He forms the nature of the human mind, but in so far as He has at the same time with the human mind the idea also of another thing, then we say that the human mind perceives the thing partially or adequately.[14]

We can say that "inadequate perception" or "error" reduces to being an instance of an incomplete idea, and that this incomplete idea is only completed in the "infinite" intelligence of God. Thus, falsity cannot be accounted for in positive terms; for "this mode of thought cannot be in God."[15] All ideas which refer to God must be true,

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[13]Hampshire, Spinoza, p. 102.

[14]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 11, p. 88.

[15]Ibid., Prop. 33, p. 107.

and it has already been shown that nothing can 'be' outside of God. So in Spinoza's schema then there is quite literally no place for false ideas.

This position in regard to falsity, however, would seem to have quite drastic consequences on the possibility of truth for the individual. If a true idea is a complete idea, can anyone besides God have a true idea? "Inadequate ideas", we remember, "arise in us only because we are parts of a thinking being"[16], but since we are finite, since our thoughts can only be parts of the "one idea", we would seem to be doomed to inadequacy of idea. As a "finite mode", man must be barred, by definition, from possessing adequate knowledge, being rather a seat of inadequacy and confusion. ". . . no ideas, therefore, are inadequate or confused unless in so far as they are related to the individual mind of some person."[17]

Man's finite nature is not always a disadvantage however. When something is "common to everything" and is present "equally in the part and in the whole"[18], then this must be equally well understood by both God and man. Furthermore, it must be equally well understood by all men, since all men must possess it. Thus, there are those ideas which ". . . must be adequately, that is to say, clearly and distinctly perceived by all."[19] These ideas, or notions, are called "common" by Spinoza, and are said to form "the foundations of our reasoning."[20]

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[16]Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 25.
[17]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 38, p. 109.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid., Prop. 40, p. 110.
[20]Ibid.

This "common" sort of knowledge constitutes the "second kind" of knowledge:

> From our possessing common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (Corol. Prop. 38, Prop. 39, with Corol. and Prop. 40, pt. 2). This I shall call reason and knowledge of the second kind.[21]

While knowledge of the second kind must be true, as "knowledge of the second and third kinds is necessarily true"[22], it lacks the 'perfection' of truth which is characteristic of the third kind; it lacks it both because of how the knowledge is obtained and of what the knowledge is about. At the second level we come to know through reason, rather than through intuition, and what we come to know is "only a property, never an essence"[23] of that which is known. We cannot know essences at this level just because we are dealing with common notions, and "that which is common does not pertain to the essence of B, nor does it form the essence of any other individual things."[24]

Having looked at a few instances of what the second kind of knowledge cannot be, what sort of examples does Spinoza offer us of what it <u>can</u> be. As he gives only a few examples of the sort of "deduction" that he is thinking of, let us consider them in turn.

> We deduce one thing from another as follows: when we clearly perceive that we feel a certain body and no other, we thence clearly infer that the mind is united to the body, and that their union is the cause of the given sensation; but we cannot thence absolutely understand the nature of the sensation and the vision. Or, after I have become acquainted with the

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., Prop. 41, p. 113.

[23] Spinoza, <u>O.I.U.</u>, footnote 6, p. 8.

[24] Spinoza, <u>Ethics II</u>, Prop. 37, p. 108.

> nature of vision and know that it has the property of making one and the same thing appear smaller when far off than when near, I can infer the sun is larger than it appears, and can draw other conclusions of the same kind.[25]

In the first example Spinoza stresses the vulnerability of this sort of knowledge. While we do know that the body and the mind are united, we do not know them through their "true essences", and are therefore in possession of a less than perfect knowledge:

> A conclusion of this sort, though it be certain, is yet not to be relied upon without great caution; for unless we are exceedingly careful we shall forthwith fall into error. When things are conceived thus abstractly, and not through their true essence, they are apt to be confused by the imagination.[26]

Given the sort of 'imperfection' which Spinoza has posited as being an intrinsic quality of the second kind of knowledge, we may question his classification of both the second and the third kinds of knowledge as "necessarily true" in Prop. 41. It would seem, in fact, as though that category should have been reserved for the third kind of knowledge. From this example, as well as from the notes of reservation which Spinoza has attached to it, it would seem rather that the second kind of knowledge includes instances of knowing which are true, but are not necessarily so.

Again, from the hesitancy which Spinoza expresses about this kind of knowledge, one also wonders whether "adequate" is a valid description of an idea of this kind. It seems fair to assume that Spinoza would defend his usage here by saying that these are, after all, "adequate ideas of the properties of things" not of the essences.

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[25] Spinoza, O.I.U., pp. 8-9.

[26] Ibid., footnote, p. 8.

Since the adequate idea of a property of a thing is only partial by comparison with the adequate ideas of the essence of a thing it seems fair to say that there is a distinction here which Spinoza has not developed for us: namely one between "adequate" and "fully adequate" ideas.

The second example given by Spinoza is one which is already familiar to us from Descartes.[27] While our senses provide us with information that the sun is very small, we modify and correct this impression on the basis of reason. Through an understanding of the nature of vision, we realize the inadequacy of the image we have received as a reflection of what size the sun actually is. This example, wherein an inaccurate sense-impression is corrected through the use of reason, is a good example of the relationships which the first and second kinds of knowledge bear to each other.

Let us consider just one more example.

> Let there be three numbers given through which it is required to discover a fourth which shall be to the third as the second is to the first. A merchant does not hesitate to multiply the second and third together and divide the product by the first, either . . . because he has seen the truth of the rule with more simple numbers, or because from the 19th Prop. in the 7th book of Euclid he understands the common property of all proportionals.[28]

This mathematical example would be a good instance of conceiving "abstractly" for Spinoza, and we can also appreciate it as an instance of a "common notion". If we have sufficiently understood Euclid's 19th

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[27]Descartes, Meditation III, The Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. and ed. E. Haldane and G. Ross, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970), 1:161.

[28]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 40, p. 113.

Prop., we shall be able to utilize this notion in solving new problems that we come into contact with. Indeed, it is "common" just inasmuch as we can apply it to fresh problems in this manner.

Having considered these few examples of what the second kind of knowledge is, let us compare the first and the second kinds of knowledge upon the basis of our analysis to this point. The first kind of knowledge was inferior on two grounds. It was inferior epistemologically, because of its origin: that is, because it was "externally" caused. The second kind of knowledge, by contrast, is "internally" caused; yet it too suffers from an epistemological defect. In this case reasoning simply lacks the perfection of an "intuitive" grasping of knowledge.

The second source of inferiority of the first kind of knowledge was ontological and was based on the fact that this sort of knowledge was a knowledge of "individual things". The second kind of knowledge does not share this defect, being rather a knowledge of "common notions". Again, however, there is a certain inadequacy, based on the fact that what can be known at this level are "properties" rather than "essences" of things.

In summary, the knowledge gained at the second level is that sort of knowing wherein we can see a Coherence theory of truth operative. Knowledge obtained at this level is true: true because it is "internally caused", true because it is based on "reasoning", and true because it is either knowledge of "common notions" or "adequate ideas" of the "properties of things". It lacks those qualities of fragmentedness

and incompleteness which were evident at the first level; but it still does not exhibit those qualities of perfection which are only found at the third level.

What of the activity of the mind at this level? For Spinoza, we remember, there is a correlation between the activity of the mind and the adequacy of knowledge. The first level of knowledge was one of passivity, reflecting a state of being 'acted upon' rather than of 'acting'. ". . . the passive states depend upon those ideas alone which are inadequate."[29] The second kind of knowledge, however, deals with ideas which are "adequate", so it must be active, as ". . . in so far as it (our mind) has adequate ideas, it necessarily acts."[30] At this level of knowledge we are in control of our knowing: in control both because the cause of our knowledge is now ourselves (voluntary cognition) rather than our environment (passive perception) and because the objects of our knowing are general notions and adequate ideas, rather than individual objects.

We concluded the last chapter by a consideration of the relationship between Correspondence and Coherence Theories; we characterized Coherence Theory as "reason", occupying a relationship to Correspondence similar to that of a parent to a child. In this chapter we have seen the role of the parent 'fleshed out' in our discussion of Coherence Theory, and of its relationship to the second level of knowledge. As we have seen, however, the second level, while much superior to the first, also

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[29]Spinoza, Ethics III, Prop. 3, p. 134.

[30]Ibid., Prop. 1, p. 129.

suffers deficiencies when compared to the third. If we can imagine ourselves as ascending to different 'levels' in our knowledge, then the second is an intermediate and a necessary step to the third; nor would Spinoza object to this analogy. "The effort or the desire to know things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind, but may arise from the second kind of knowledge."[31] We must now turn to what Spinoza takes to be an epistemological 'pinnacle': knowledge of the third kind.

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[31] Ethics I, Prop. 28, p. 270.

CHAPTER 3

CLARITY AND DISTINCTNESS

Why, the reader may ask, are we discussing 'clarity and distinctness' along with Correspondence and Coherency Theories? I answer by claiming that to complete our consideration of the epistemological triad which Spinoza constructs, it is necessary to give consideration to a 'clarity and distinctness' theory as a distinctive theory. Certainly the use of such a theory in Spinoza demands discussion, and this discussion, in turn, demands an elucidation of Descartes' use, influential as this must have been on Spinoza's work. Leibniz is also of interest to us since we can perceive the influence of both Descartes and Spinoza: the former, in his definition of truth and clarity, the latter in his discussion of intuition.

I feel that this may not be adequately discussed under headings of either Correspondence or Coherence Truth Theories. Neither a theory which is espousing a correspondence between "belief and fact" nor one which is reliant upon our beliefs forming a coherent system is adequate for a discussion of Descartes' usage of "clear and distinct". Rather, clarity and distinctness become separate criteria of truth for him; what is perceived "clearly and distinctly" is <u>true</u>. While I wish to address myself critically to this criterion in the next chapter, I hope here to provide some textual evidence for the existence of the theory.

I. Descartes and Leibniz

Descartes says the following about "clear and distinct" perception;

> There are even a number of people who throughout all their lives perceive nothing so correctly as to be capable of judging it properly. For the knowledge upon which a certain and incontrovertable judgement can be formed, should not alone be clear but also distinct. I term that clear which is present and apparent to an attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear . . .
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> When, for instance, a severe pain is felt, the perception of this pain may be very clear, and yet for all that not distinct, because it is usually confused by the sufferers with the obscure judgement that they form upon its nature, assuming as they do that something exists in the part affected, similar to the sensation of pain of which they are alone clearly conscious. In this way perception may be clear without being distinct, and cannot be distinct without also being clear.[1]

To call something clear for Descartes is to make a claim about either an observer or a perceiver: "I term that clear which is present and apparent to an attentive mind." The example he gives us is of perceiving an intense or sharp pain. I could say that I was experiencing and perceiving a sharp pain under the following sort of circumstances. I might have burned my left hand a few minutes ago, and now be suffering from the burn. What is clear to me is that I am involved in pain. While the sensation of the pain is clear, however, it is not distinct. The pain I experience can become obscured by "judgements" that I formulate

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[1] R. Descartes, Principles of Philosophy, The Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. and ed. E. Haldane and G. Ross, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970), 1:237.

about the nature of it. I can, for example, assume that "something exists" in my burned hand which is somehow related to, or similar to, the pain which I am conscious of.

What of the distinct then? For us to say that something is distinct to us the conditions for clarity must first of all be met, as perception ". . . cannot be distinct without also being clear." There is an additional factor with distinctness; a factor which will allow us to individuate objects. ". . . the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear." In other words for an object to be perceived distinctly it will possess qualities which allow one to distinguish it from all other objects. "We can conclude that two substances are really distinct one from the other from the sole fact that we can conceive the one clearly and distinctly without the other."[2]

While "distinctness" precludes false judgements, "clarity" does not. ". . . the perception of this pain may be very clear, and yet for all that not distinct, because it usually is confused by the sufferers with the obscure judgement that they form upon its nature." What is it about "distinctness", we may ask, which removes the possibility of false judgement from it? The difference would seem to be based on the fact that "clear" perceptions can be based on sense-perceptions, while "distinct" perceptions must be based on reason: For Descartes the information received by our senses must be able to undergo the scrutiny

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[2]Ibid., p. 243.

of reason before accepted as truth: since, "it would be unworthy of a philosopher to accept anything as true which he has not ascertained to be such, and to trust more to the senses, that is to judgements formed without consideration in childhood, than to the reasoning of maturity."[3]

One reason that we can be confused about perceiving with clarity is that certain things which may be clearly perceived when considered as sensation or thought, are not so perceived when we wish to attribute existence to them. Sensations felt when experiencing pain, or the sensations aroused by observing universals such as colour, fall into this category.

> . . . we ought to observe that we have a clear or distinct knowledge of pain, colour, and other things of the sort when we consider them simply as sensations or thoughts. But when we desire to judge of such matters as existing outside of our mind, we can in no wise conceive what sort of things they are.[4]

Although sensations are a source of error, we need not reject the external world as a source of knowledge:

> I distinguish all the objects of our knowledge either into things or the affections of things, or as eternal truths having no existence outside our thought . . . I do not, however, observe more than two ultimate classes of real things--the one is intellectual things, or those of the intelligence, that is, pertaining to the mind or to thinking substance, the other is material things, or that pertaining to extended substance, i.e. to body . . . to extended substance pertain magnitude or extension in length, breadth and depth, figure, movement, and such like.[4]

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[3]Ibid., p. 253.

[4]Ibid., p. 248.

Our clear perceptions of the external world, then, must be perceptions of such things as size and situation. Just because we are dealing with the external world, however, we are liable to impressions from sensations; and these will make our judgement prone to falsity. This is why we need the "distinct" qualities which we can gain through reason. When our perceptions are both clear and distinct we are assured of truth. ". . . all things which I perceive very clearly and very distinctly are true."[5]

Leibniz follows Descartes very closely in the distinction he makes between clear and distinct.

> Knowledge is clear, therefore, when it makes it possible for me to recognize the thing represented. Clear knowledge, in turn, is either confused or distinct. It is confused when I cannot enumerate one by one the marks which are sufficient to distinguish the thing from others . . . . Thus we know colors, odors, flavors, and other particular objects of the senses clearly enough and discern them from each other but only by the simple evidence of the senses and not by marks that can be expressed . . . . A distinct concept, however, is the kind of notion which assayers have of gold; are namely, which enables them to distinguish gold from all other bodies by sufficient marks and observations.[6]

Even more interesting for us, as readers of Spinoza however, are his remarks on intuition:

> When a concept is very complex, we certainly cannot think simultaneously of all the concepts which compose it. But when this is possible, or at least insofar as it is possible, I call the knowledge intuitive. There is no other knowledge than intuitive of a distinct primitive concept, while for the most part we have only symbolic thought of composites. This already shows that we do not perceive the ideas even of those things which we know distinctly, except insofar as we use intuitive thought.[7]

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[6]Gottfried Leibniz, "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas", G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters, trans. and ed. L. Loemker (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Co., 1956), pp. 291-292.

[7]Ibid., p. 292.

By the end of this chapter, the influence of Spinoza on this remark should hopefully be evident.

'Clear and distinct' perceptions, then, can relate both to the external world of objects and to the internal world of ideas: they must relate to the latter. What we perceive clearly must be subjected to the rigorous scrutiny of reason, and this is brought out as a requirement of "distinctly". We can also perceive clearly and distinctly solely within the realm of ideas; reason is, after all, paramount.

II. Spinoza

How do these notions of clarity and distinctness fit within Spinoza's schema? We have seen how he develops the first 'levels' of his epistemological structure. The first kind of knowledge was an inadequate one. This was the level where sense impressions crowded in upon passive observers and where Correspondence Theory was operative. The second kind of knowledge was adequate, but not yet perfect. While it was the level of Coherence, and the level where reason was operative, it was limited by virtue of the abstract material with which it dealt, as well as by the process (namely reason) through which it was arrived at. We must now consider the most perfect kind of knowing.

"Ideas which are clear and distinct" Spinoza says, "can never be false"[8], thereby echoing Descartes' criterion for truth which

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[8]Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 21.

we have just considered. They can never be false just because such ideas must either be very simple themselves or be "compounds" from such ideas: ". . . ideas of things clearly and distinctly conceived are either very simple themselves, or are compounded from very simple ideas--that is, are deduced therefrom." Confused ideas, on the other hand, "cannot be clear and distinct."[9] Confusion always arises from the mind having "only partial knowledge", and not "distinguishing" between what is known and what is not known; but it also arises from a directing of attention "promiscuously to all parts of an object at once without making distinctions."[10] So in order to avoid confusion and to have "clear and distinct ideas" we should break up our complex thoughts into their simplest elements.

> . . . if the idea be of something very simple; it must necessarily be clear and distinct. For if a very simple object cannot be known in part; it must either be known altogether or not at all. Secondly, it follows that if a complex object be divided by thought into a number of simple component parts, and if each part be regarded separately, all confusion will disappear. Thirdly, it follows that fiction cannot be simple, but is made up of the blending of several confused ideas of diverse objects or actions existent in nature, or rather is composed of attention directed to all such ideas at once, and unaccompanied by any mental assent.[11]

In Chapter II, we recall, when we considered falsity, we found it to be an instance of "incompleteness"; we raised the issue of whether man, as a "finite mode", could indeed know anything. "Common notions" and abstract thought were found to provide us with knowledge at this level. The procedure brought out in the above quote, however, is not one of abstract reasoning. It is rather a directive for us to 'focus'

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[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

our thoughts. Confusion and error, we are told, are the result of a "promiscuous" focusing of our attention. What we must learn to do instead is to 'divide' complex ideas into their simple elements, and once we have a clear and distinct perception of each of these, then we can reconstruct them, this time gaining an understanding of the whole.

This prescription for division is already familiar to us from Descartes, who advocated division of difficulties "into as many parts as possible and as seemed requisite in order that it might be resolved in the best manner possible."[12] An example given here by Spinoza allows us to appreciate the utilization he makes of Descartes' suggestion. Some people, he says, imagine "dieties in woods or statues."[13] If we were to have such a clear idea of either deities or of trees as to be aware of their distinctiveness however, we would realize the error of this 'combination'.

In the suggestion of Spinoza's that we 'break-down' our complex ideas into simple ones, we seem to have a taking up of Descartes' methodological suggestions. Is there, in fact, something more in Spinoza's reasoning? The third step in Descartes' method was one of carrying on reflections in "due order". We should start with the simplest objects of knowledge and work our way up to knowledge of a more complex order. This is done, he says; "in order to rise little by little, or by degrees, to knowledge of the most complex, assuming an order, even if

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[12] R. Descartes, On the Method, The Philosophical Works, p. 92.

[13] B. Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 23.

a ficticious one, among those which do not follow a natural sequence relatively to one another."[14] We proceed, he says, like geometricians, along "chains of reasoning". What Descartes presents us with then is a procedure, a method.

Let us turn back to Spinoza. He says:

> Lastly, they (mistakes) arise from a want of understanding of the primary elements of Nature as a whole; whence we proceed without due order, and confound Nature with abstract rules, which, although they be true enough in their sphere, yet, when misapplied, confound themselves, and pervert the order of Nature. However, if we proceed with as little abstraction as possible, and begin with primary elements--that is, from the source and origin of Nature, as far back as we can reach--we need not fear deceptions of this kind. As far as the knowledge of the origin of Nature is concerned, there is no danger of confounding it with abstractions . . . .
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> . . . since the first principle of Nature cannot (as we shall see hereafter) be conceived abstractly or universally, and cannot extend further in the understanding than it does in reality, and has no likeness to mutable things, no confusion need be feared in respect to the idea of it, provided (as before shown) that we possess a standard of truth. This is, in fact, a being single and infinite; in other words, it is the sum total of being, beyond which there is no being.[15]

Not only falsity may be dealt with by such a procedure Spinoza claims, but also doubt; and here he opposes his method to the scepticism of Descartes;

> Hence we cannot cast doubt on true ideas by the supposition that there is a doubtful Deity who leads us astray even in what is most certain. We can only hold such an hypothesis so long as we have no clear and distinct ideas--in other words, until we reflect on the knowledge which we have of the first principle of all things, and find that which teaches us that God is not a deceiver, and until we know this with the same certainty as we know from reflecting on the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles. But if we have a knowledge

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[14] R. Descartes, On the Method, p. 92.

[15] B. Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 26.

> of God equal to that which we have of a triangle, all doubt is removed. In the same way as we can arrive at the said knowledge of a triangle, though not absolutely sure that there is not some arch deceiver leading us astray, so can we come to a like knowledge of God under the like condition, and when we have attained to it, it is sufficient, as I have said before, to remove every doubt which we can possess concerning clear and distinct ideas. Thus, if a man proceeded without investigations in due order, inquiring first into those things which should first be inquired into, never passing over a link in the chain of association, and with knowledge how to define his questions before seeking to answer them, he will never have any ideas but such as are very certain, or, in other words, clear and distinct; for doubt is only a suspension of the spirit concerning some affirmation or negation which it would pronounce upon unhesitatingly if it were not in ignorance of something, without which the knowledge of the matter at hand must needs be imperfect. We may, therefore, conclude that doubt always proceeds from want of due order in investigation.[16]

From these two passages, it would seem evident that Spinoza, unlike Descartes, is not simply directing us to a method. As in sections of his work considered in earlier chapters, it would appear here too that his metaphysical assumptions have directed the way in which his epistemology would go. His claim is not simply that a method of division and a procedure which starts from simple elements and which works to more complex ones is a superior method, but rather that this method is the most faithful mirror of reality. There <u>is</u> a certain order in nature, and we must look for a method which allows us to trace this true order. Further, once we have discovered this order, and we conduct our investigation accordingly, that is, according to this correct order, beginning with the 'first principle' then the ideas that we experience will necessarily be 'clear and distinct' ones.

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[16]Ibid., pp. 27-28.

It is this sort of knowing which constitutes the third kind of knowledge, that knowing which Spinoza refers to as "intuitive". This is our most excellent example of deduction. ". . . there is a third, as I shall hereafter show, which we call intuitive science. This kind of knowing advances from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things."[17] As with the second kind of knowledge, the examples he gives us of this are few, so let us consider one of them.

> Lastly there is the perception arising when a thing is perceived solely through its essence, or through the knowledge of its proximate cause . . . a thing may be perceived solely through its essence: when, from the fact of knowing something, I know what it is to know that thing, or when, from knowing the essence of the mind, I know that it is united to the body. By the same kind of knowledge we know that two and three make five, or that two lines each parallel to a third, are parallel to one another, etc. The things which I have been able to know by this kind of knowledge are as yet very few.[18]

We may note that the examples given here are not very satisfactory ones; not satisfactory because of the circular reasoning entailed in telling us that things are known through their essences, when from "the fact of knowing something, I know what it is to know that thing." Within the context of the third kind of knowledge, however, its meaning does not seem so obscure. There cannot be a possibility of not knowing at this level. We know by the most excellent sort of perception, namely 'intuition', and we know 'essences' or 'proximate causes'.

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[17] Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 40, p. 112.

[18] Spinoza, O.I.U., pp. 8-9.

There is yet another factor present at this level, namely, that at this level of knowledge we follow the 'order of nature', and begin our investigation with the 'first principle'. Because of this, what we come to know at this level is 'necessarily' true consisting, as it does, only of clear and distinct ideas. If our mind does not follow this correct order, however, we will not be able to achieve this level of knowledge, of absolute certainty. Thus, the 'true method' directs us to the correct 'order' of our knowing. "True method does not consist in seeking for the signs of truth after the acquisition of the idea, but that the true method teaches us the order in which we should seek for truth itself."[19]

Thus, if we truly understand the nature of the human mind, we know with certainty and through intuition that the mind is in fact united with the body. We can contrast this with the second level of knowledge where our knowledge of the union of the body and the mind was based on our 'feeling' a certain body and was therefore inadequate. Similarly, it is only when we sufficiently understand the nature of numbers that we will be able to perform the operations of addition or subtraction.

When we grasp the 'essence' of something in this manner, then we will be able to deduce all of its 'properties' from this essence. "A conception or definition of a thing should be such that all the properties of that thing . . . can be deduced from it."[20] If we hope to understand essences by first understanding properties however, we

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[19]Ibid., p. 13.

[20]Ibid., p. 32.

will be disillusioned, since "the properties of things are not understood so long as their essences are unknown. If the latter be passed over there is necessarily a perversion of the succession of ideas which should reflect the succession of Nature, and we go far astray from our object."[21] The knowledge of essences, then, makes of our knowing a sort of geometry. From the 'foundations' which this knowledge provides we can derive the rest of our knowledge.

Let us attempt a summary of this sort of knowledge, contrasting it with the first and second kinds. The epistemological inferiority of the first kind of knowledge was due to its being "externally caused", while that of the second was due to it being a process of "reason". The third by contrast is a knowing by 'intuition', which is that process of knowing which Spinoza considers to be the most perfect.

There was also an ontological inferiority at both the first and second level: to the first level because it was a knowledge of 'individual things', and to the second level because it was a knowledge of 'abstractions', and of 'properties'. This level, on the other hand, deals with 'essences' and with 'proximate causes', and from a knowledge of essences we can derive a knowledge of properties. This level is also the one where our thoughts follow the correct order, 'reflecting' the order of nature for only then do we have clear and distinct thoughts.

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[21] Ibid.

> The object aimed at is the acquisition of clear and distinct ideas, such as are produced by the pure intellect, and not by chance physical motions. In order that all ideas may be reduced to unity, we shall endeavor so to associate and arrange them that our mind may, as far as possible, reflect subjectively the reality of Nature, both as a whole and as parts.[22]

Since this level of knowledge is considered to be the most perfect, both in epistemological and metaphysical terms, we can assume that the mind will be very active. Passivity was a characteristic primarily of the first level, and was a characteristic of imperfect knowledge, inasmuch as the mind was operated upon, rather than operating upon. We are not surprised, then, to find the following;

> The ideas which we form as clear and distinct seem so to follow from the sole necessity of our nature, that they appear to depend absolutely on its sole power; with confused ideas the contrary is the case. They are often formed against our will.[23]

This, then, is the peak of our epistemological possibilities. We are here fully in command of our thought; that is our thought originates with us rather than being caused by the environment. Further, we have an intuitive grasp of our knowledge, rather than having to work through processes of reasoning. We can have this intuitive grasp because of the order of our knowledge. Reflecting the order of nature, our ideas start with the idea of a first principle:

> As regards the order of our perceptions and the manner in which they should be arranged and united, it is necessary that, as soon as it is possible and rational, we should inquire whether there be any being (and, if so, what being) that is the cause of all things, so that its essence, represented in thought,

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[22]Ibid., p. 31.

[23]Ibid., p. 36.

> may be the cause of all our ideas, and then our mind will to the utmost possible extent reflect Nature. For it will possess, subjectively, Nature's essence, order, and union.[24]

Once we have achieved this reflection of Nature's order our knowledge will also have the proper order: namely, going from an understanding of essences and proximate causes to an understanding of properties. Not only will our knowledge follow a certain order, it will have a certain form, that of being simple or "specialized"; as ". . . the best basis for drawing a conclusion is a particular affirmative essence. The more specialized the idea is, the more it is distinct, and therefore clear."[25] At this level our ideas, 'necessarily' true, are all "clear and distinct" ones.

This, then, is Spinoza's apex of knowledge. The pursuit of this ideal is not simply a sign of wisdom but also of virtue. "The highest effort of the mind and its highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge"; since this sort of knowing moves "from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things . . . and the more we understand things in this manner . . . the more we understand God."[26] While this type of knowledge is a potentiality for the 'highest good' which is 'common to all'[27], Spinoza does admit that its attainment is rare: "If the way . . . seem very difficult, it can nevertheless be found. It must indeed be difficult since it is so seldom discovered. . . But all noble things are as difficult as they are rare."[28]

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[24]Ibid., p. 33.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Spinoza, Ethics V, Prop. 25, p. 269.

[27]Spinoza, Ethics IV, Prop. 36, p. 213.

[28]Spinoza, Ethics V, Prop. 42, p. 280.

CHAPTER 4

SPINOZA'S MISTAKE

We have now completed our undertaking of examining the epistemological structure which Spinoza has constructed. It was suggested at the beginning of this thesis that Spinoza was adhering to three truth theories rather than to one, and that these different theories were evidenced at the different levels of knowledge which he postulates. In Chapter One we examined his first level of knowledge and found Correspondence Theory to be operative. In Chapter Two Coherence Theory was shown to function at the second level and in Chapter Three a Theory of clarity and distinction was developed in order to explain the theory which was operative at the third level. While the previous chapters have addressed themselves to an exposition of these theories, the aim of this final chapter will be one of critical assessment rather than of explanation.

In developing his epistemology Spinoza constructs for us a ladder like structure. There are, in consequence, 'degrees' of truth in his theory. The first kind of knowledge, imperfect as it is, is classified as knowledge and not as belief. Truth at this level is imperfect, fractured and "partial". With the second kind of knowledge we no longer suffer from our knowledge being only partial; indeed, the knowledge at this level is one of "common notions". Although it is adequate, this knowing is still not perfect. It is abstract in

nature and is derived through reason; these two features militate against its perfection. With the third kind of knowledge we achieve perfection: perfection both in content and in process. We know through a process of intuition, and what we know are "essences" or "proximate causes". Further, at this level the "order" of our knowing is correct; that is, we duplicate in our thinking that order which exists in nature, beginning with a "first principle".

What can we say about this development of a hierarchy of knowledge? It seems that we must characterize the model as wrong, since ". . . what is only half true is untrue. Truth cannot tolerate a more or less."[1] We cannot speak of a statement being 'more' or 'less' true; it must be either true or false. The same is surely true of factual knowledge. I cannot 'more' or 'less' know, rather I know or I do not know.[2] I may think, I may believe, but I do not know.

Why does Spinoza make a mistake such as this? I answer: He blurs a distinction between perception and truth or knowledge by applying the 'more or 'less' model to knowledge and truth which really applies to examples chosen from perception. Let us consider the following example of perception, dealing with vision. I can say legitimately the following sentences:

"I can see the cup very well."

"I can see the cup, but not very well."

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[1]G. Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry", Philosophical Logic, ed. A. Strawson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 19.

[2]We may contrast this with knowledge of people, however, where we can speak of knowledge by acquaintance, "I know her slightly", or with knowledge of a skill, "I know how to type fairly well."

"I can barely see the cup."

The first sentence tells us that those conditions that are requisite for the clear perception of an object have all been met, and we can see the cup as well as possible. In the second sentence we learn that while our observer can see the cup, conditions are such that he cannot see it very well. (He might, for example, not be able to make out details of a design on the side of the cup.) In the third example, we are informed that while our observer can still see the cup, he can barely do so. (We can envision a twilit room, wherein we can only perceive shapes.)

We can make a similar example of hearing:

"I can hear the record very well."

"I can hear the record but not very well."

"I can barely hear the record."

The first example again refers us to a close to ideal situation, in which I can hear the record as well as is possible. In the second instance I can hear the record, but not satisfactorily. I have to strain to hear, and I fear I have missed some parts of the music. In the third case I can barely hear the record, since only a faint sound is discernable.

We can see that this sort of distinction of more or less applies to perception; but how does it fare if our example is knowledge or truth?

(i) a. "I know that the cat is on the mat very well/perfectly."[3]

"I know that the cat is on the mat, but not very well/not perfectly."

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[3]When I say "I know that 'x' very well, I mean "Of course I know that 'x'."

"I barely know that the cat is on the mat."

b. "It is absolutely true that the cat is on the mat."

"It is not absolutely true that the cat is on the mat."

"It is barely true that the cat is on the mat."

All of these sentences are implausible: implausible because 'knowledge' and 'truth' cannot function in the same manner as perception words such as "see" or "hear". While we have seen that the latter are open to a receiving of degrees, the former must be understood in an absolute manner.

(ii) "I know x." "x is true."

"I do not know x." "x is not true."

With Spinoza, however, we are committed to the examples of (i). At the first level of knowledge we can say "I barely know that x" (inadequately) or "It is barely true that x". At the second level we can say "I know that x, but not very well" (imperfectly) or "It is true that x; but not absolutely true", and at the third level we can say "I know x perfectly" or "x is absolutely true."

Why, we may ask, does Spinoza commit himself to a system of epistemology wherein truth and knowledge may be expressed in degrees? It seems most plausible to me to say that his metaphysical stance is what commits him to this error. In chapter two we brought up the inability of Spinoza to explain falsity within the framework which he had created. We must now reintroduce this subject in our effort to explain the inadequacy of his epistemology as a whole.

Although finite beings, such as man, can experience finite modes of thought, "infinite" thought is an attribute of the infinite

Being, or God. Since God is only one, his "idea", too, must be single.[4] Further, "All ideas, insofar as they are related to God are true."[5] Since ideas which refer to God must be true, and nothing can "be" outside of God, there is no "place for false ideas." Given this metaphysical stance, it is obvious that Spinoza must develop some form of explanation for falsity, and the one that he gives us is one of "inadequacy". As our interest here is in an explanation of truth rather than falsity, however, we will not attempt an analysis of this substitution of an "inadequacy" theory for an explanation of falsity, but will rather concern ourselves with the role this plays in his explanation of truth.

Error, we recall, reduces to being an instance of an "incomplete idea". Once our knowledge is "complete" rather than "fractured", we will understand, and our knowledge will then be "adequate". The whole first kind of knowledge, we could say, can be seen as a case of "partial" knowledge, partial knowledge which can only be completed at a higher level. With the second kind of knowledge we advance to the adequacy of common notions, and with the third kind of knowledge we achieve the perfection of intuitive knowledge, a knowledge of essences.

We can see how, by this graduated process of knowing, Spinoza can accomodate the metaphysical structure which he has

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[4]Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 9, p. 86.

[5]Ibid., Prop. 32, p. 107.

postulated. Error and falsity do not need to be dealt with since they are only problems which arise due to the inadequacy of knowledge at the first level. The universe is a single and coherent whole which moves according to discernible laws; problems of knowing occur when individuals fail to perceive those fundamental patterns and laws--when they fail to understand the universe as a whole. If our knowledge is based on our perceptions of individual objects, perceptions which have been externally caused, it is by nature inadequate and partial; when we know in this manner, we fail to perceive the pattern of the whole. It is only when our knowledge has as its basis, or "foundation", the correct starting place, namely that of the "first principle", or "cause" that our knowledge can be absolutely adequate. When our knowing does proceed in this correct manner, then truly "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."[6]

It is interesting to notice how the notions of adequacy of knowledge and activity of the individual are equated in this epistemology. At the first level of knowledge when our knowing is inadequate and when our criterion of truth is one of correspondence, we are passive. Sense perceptions of the external world crowd in upon us, and we are powerless to sort them out. Thus, "the passive states are not related to the mind, unless insofar as it possesses something which involves negation; in other words, unless insofar as it is considered as a part

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[6] Ibid., Prop. 7, p. 83.

of Nature which by itself/and without the other parts cannot be clearly and distinctly perceived."[7] When our mind is passive it receives isolated and unrelated fragments or impressions: impressions which it does not act upon to weave into a coherent whole.

Actions of the mind, on the other hand, "arise from adequate ideas alone"[8]; the second and third levels of knowledge are these levels wherein this activity of the mind is achieved. Spinoza speaks most often of the activity of the second and third levels of knowledge together, as being those levels wherein the mind is active; but just as the third level of knowledge is superior to the second both in the the process of knowing and the content of the knowledge, so too must it be the more active. The second level of knowledge, while "adequate", is not yet "perfect" for Spinoza writes: "the more perfection a thing possesses, the more it acts and the less it suffers; and conversely the more it acts, the more perfect it is."[9]

Along with the greater perfection of this third level of knowledge goes a greater "power", the power of controlling those emotions which tend to 'control' us at the first level of knowledge.

> From all this we can easily conceive what is the power which clear and distinct knowledge, and especially that third level of knowledge . . . whose foundation is the knowledge itself of God possesses over the emotions--the power, namely by which it is able, insofar as they are passions, if not actually

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[7]Spinoza, Ethics III, Prop. 3, p. 134.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Spinoza, Ethics V, Prop. 40, p. 278.

> to destroy them . . . at least to make them constitute the smallest part of the mind.[10]

Let us briefly review this scale. At the first level of knowledge Spinoza is committed to the statement "I barely know that x". The reason why I "barely know that x" is that I am a passive observer of the world, an observer who receives many unrelated and externally caused perceptions from the world around me. While order is present in the universe, I, in my helpless state, do not perceive it. A correspondence theory of truth is operative at this level: a correspondence of an individual idea and an individual external object; but we are limited to knowing these individual ideas and objects (whose very individuality makes them inferior epistemologically). Therefore at this level we say "It is barely true that x."

At the second level of knowledge we can say, "I know that x, but not very well/not perfectly.". While our mind has become active at this level, there are still inadequacies to our knowledge. It is of "common notions" and of "adequate ideas of the properties of things."[11] This is the level of a Coherence Theory of Truth, in which our "common" notions allow us to appreciate how our knowledge must indeed cohere into one system. "That which is common" however, "does not perceive the essence."[12], nor does it reveal the true "order" of the universe.

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[10] Ibid., Prop. 20, p. 267.

[11] Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 40, p. 112.

[12] Ibid., Prop. 37, p. 109.

Thus, we can also say at this level: "It is true that x, but not absolutely true." We are limited here both by the "abstractness" of the material with which we deal and by the process of reasoning which we are utilizing.

At the third level we can say, "I know very well/perfectly." At this level of knowledge, wherein our mind is at its most active, our criterion for truth is that it be "clear and distinct". Since it is clear and distinct it will either be of simple ideas, or combinations of simple ideas. These simple ideas or their combinations, however, are also our most profound ones. We gain them through a process of intuition, and they reveal to us "essences" and "proximate causes". Even more important, however, is that they have the correct "order". Moving from a first "principle" or "cause" our minds observe that same order which is present in the universe. While dealing with the external world, even as the first level did,we are immune to error: immune just because we are dealing with the whole of the universe in its correct sequence as it has been intuitively perceived, rather than struggling with individual aspects of it which are presented to us in a haphazard manner. This level also lacks the problems of the second level, as we do not deal with abstractions; but rather with "inmost essences" which "must be sought solely from fixed and eternal things, and from the laws, inscribed (so to speak) in those things as in their true codes, according to which all particular things take place and are arranged."[13] At this level we can say "x is absolutely

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[13]Spinoza, O.I.U., p. 34.

true."

Our analysis has so far enabled us to perceive how Spinoza develops his theory of "degrees" of truth: a theory which allows him to utilize different theories of truth to correspond to the differing degrees of knowledge (inadequate, adequate, and clear and distinct). We have seen further, how this theory can be seen as a not surprising outcome of Spinoza's metaphysics, but we have nevertheless criticized him for blurring the distinction between perception and knowledge and utilizing examples of knowledge and truth which could only have legitimately been used with perception.

There is yet another blurring which we must criticize Spinoza for, however, and this one occurs distinctly at his third level of knowledge. I have already argued in chapter three that Spinoza accepts clarity and distinctness as a criterion for truth: I would like to here criticize his acceptance that: "Ideas which are clear and distinct can never be false."[14]

It has been pointed out that philosophers have failed to sufficiently distinguish between the content of a proposition and a certain kind of act which may be, for example, asserting something. "Therefore two things must be distinguished in an indicative sentence: the content, which it has in common with the corresponding sentence-question, and the assertion. The former is the thought, or at least contains the thought. So it is possible to express the thought without

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[14]Ibid., p. 21.

laying it down as true."[15]

We can make use of Frege's distinction to yield yet a further distinction: namely one between and act and an achievement. An act can be understood as asserting a claim; an achievement can be understood as knowledge as to what the content of the claim is. While an act, being based on perception, can be expressed in 'degree', an achievement, or knowledge of a fact, cannot be. For example, I may assert to my listener that "the cat is on the mat." If there is an error in my claim does it reside in my act of asserting to you where the cat is, or does it rather reside in the achievement of making clear to you what it is that I am asserting. I claim that it is in the act of asserting that I go wrong. It is in my judgement or in my judging or asserting that the cat is on the mat that I am in error, not in the achievement of mind or speech which makes it possible to know the content of the judgement or the assertion. In terms of clarity, we could say that it was in believing it to be clear that 'x' that I made my mistake, not in being clear that 'x'.

There is yet another ingredient in his conflation, however, and that is an activity of the mind. At the third level of knowledge, when the mind is most active, activity, clarity and truth merge. Action thus becomes one with knowledge for Spinoza, and a differentiation between an act, and content or achievement, is simply not possible for him to make. My act of judging and asserting 'x' has become one with the knowledge of 'x', and to know is to take it to be true.[15]

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[15] G. Frege, "The Thought . . .", p. 21.

[16] Spinoza, Ethics II, Prop. 49, pp. 119-120.

Error and correctness, however, reside only in acts, action and activity. One may be wrong in asserting something though it be perfectly clear and I know what the content of the assertion is. What sort of consequence does this have for Spinoza? Let us consider the following example. A has told B that John is in Banff. B says to C: "John is in Banff." Now since A, B, and C are all acquainted with both the person John and the place Banff, it seems plausible to say that when B made the above statement to C, C had a "clear and distinct" idea of what is being asserted. Unknown to B however, A has made a false statement. John is in Jasper rather than in Banff. The assertion of whose content C has the clear and distinct idea, then, is mistaken. In a diagnosis of this example, we see that it is A's act of asserting that is the seat of the error. Correspondingly, it is in believing A's act of asserting that B goes wrong. What we cannot find fault with is the content of A's claim; which was both clear and distinct.

Let us consider another example. A says to B that the transmission of his car has seized. B does not drive, nor does he have any knowledge of the mechanism of automobiles. C was standing further away from A than B was and did not hear what A said. So he asks B to repeat it for him. Now the fact that B does not understand the content of what A has said does not prevent him from making an assertion which will make clear what A has said to C. From this example we see that the claim is true even though made by someone who did not possess the clear and distinct idea that formed its content.

Examples such as these must have serious consequences for a theory which accepts clarity and distinctness as synonomous with truth. We have seen that on the one hand an idea may be both clear and distinct and yet there may be falsity in asserting it. On the other hand, a claim may be true when made by someone who does not possess the clear and distinct idea that forms its content. If, from examples such as these, we deny Spinoza's claim that clarity and distinctness are indeed the truth, what would we rather say about them? It would seem most plausible to describe them rather as being prerequisites for achievements of mind or speech than as being the truth. Even as conditions of obscurity militate against these achievements, so too must conditions of clarity and distinctness militate for them. Thus, we speak of "making something clear", and understand by this that we make more comprehendible something which was obscure. Unfortunately, as we have already seen, Spinoza goes beyond this claim which we would allow him.

We have already mentioned the distinction which we feel that Spinoza is not making here (that between "content" and "act" or "achievement" and "act"); now we may ask why he fails to do so. The answer to this would seem to be related to the diagnosis which we attempted on the system of "degrees" of truth which Spinoza creates. We can see, that is, how Spinoza makes 'degrees' of clarity correspond to 'degrees' of truth. The first level of knowledge is obscure, not clear at all, while the second level must be clear and the third level must be 'perfectly' clear.

Just as our earlier diagnosis of Spinoza's epistemology

made his metaphysics responsible for the error he made in regards to 'degrees' of truth; so too do we hold it responsible for his postulation of degrees of clarity and distinctness, wherein that which is most clear and distinct must also be the 'most' true. We have already seen how the monism which Spinoza postulates leaves no room for error and leads to his development of an epistemology which claims both degrees of truth and degrees of activity of the mind; now we see how it leads to degrees of clarity and distinctness. The consequent lack of distinction between "content" and "assertion" or "act" and "achievement" cannot be a surprising one for us.

With this we come to the end of our investigation. We started with a query as to what truth theory Spinoza adheres to; our investigation showed that in fact there are three: three different truth theories which are accommodated at three different levels of knowledge. While the unenlightened man remains bound at the first level of knowledge, with only the inadequacies of the Correspondence Theory of Truth to aid him, the more enlightened man progresses to the second level of knowledge where he employs the Coherence Theory as his standard of truth. Finally, some few individuals can achieve the perfection of the third level of knowledge: that level where clarity and distinctness are employed as a criterion of truth.

Having seen that Spinoza commits himself to a hierarchy of knowledge and degrees of truth we attempted to ascertain why he would so commit himself. Our response to that question was to turn an

accusing finger at his metaphysics and at his ontological commitment to monism, which so strictly limited the development of his epistemology. Other writers have pointed out to us some of the fatal flaws in Spinoza's metaphysics. We must here commit ourselves to a view that the same bell which tolls the knell for his metaphysics must also sound it for his epistemology.

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